

Oregon firm hired to demolish CFAC plant

By SAMUEL WILSON/Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Thursday, April 30, 2015 4:19 pm

A month after the Environmental Protection Agency proposed Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. for a federal Superfund designation, the company announced Thursday that it has hired an Oregon-based salvage company to begin demolition and removal of machinery and equipment at the site.

Calbag Resources of Portland will begin work at CFAC as soon as next week, according to CFAC spokesman Haley Beaudry.

“There’s several pieces of the contract,” Beaudry said. “They’re being paid directly, like a construction company, to do some work, and they’re recovering salvage to do other pieces of work.”

He added that it was his understanding that the company would use a mix of existing and local hires for the project, expected to take two to three years.

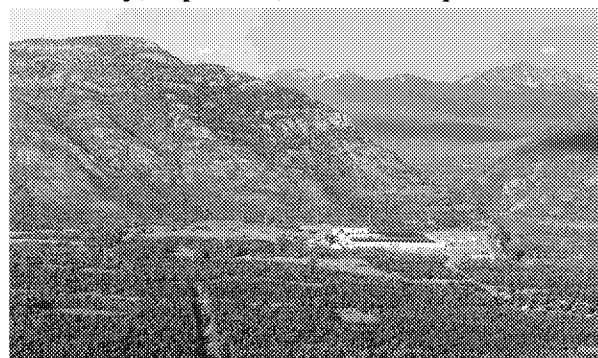
The 3,196-acre property northeast of Columbia Falls includes offices, warehouses, pump houses, coal tar pitch tanks, a laboratory, a coal paste plant and the main potline facility with 451 aluminum reduction pots, according to an EPA site assessment last year.

Beaudry would not specify which buildings will be demolished.

After more than 50 years in production under several different ownerships, the plant shut down in 2009. The company announced March 3 that it would close permanently.

Preliminary assessments by the EPA have found high levels of cyanide, arsenic, fluoride, chromium, lead and selenium in the groundwater at the site.

Glencore, the parent company of CFAC, has opposed the government’s proposal to add the plant to its National Priorities List, requesting instead that it be allowed to conduct cleanup operations independently. Company officials have been critical of the Superfund program, which they say will unnecessarily delay repurposing of the strategic industrial site and stigmatize its potential future use.



CFAC

An Oregon firm has been hired for demolition and salvage work at the Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. plant, pictured here in an aerial view. (Photo courtesy of Hungry Horse News)

However, many in the Columbia Falls community, including Mayor Don Barnhart and the Columbia Falls Chamber of Commerce, are skeptical of the company's intentions to fully clean up the contamination and say they would prefer the federal government's involvement.

Last year, Glencore broke off talks with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality after the two parties failed to agree on the terms of oversight for the cleanup plan.

Glencore has hired the environmental cleanup firm Roux Associates to craft a cleanup plan for the site.

Beaudry said the Calbag contract demonstrates the company's commitment to remediating the property.

"I know that this is the first phase, the first physically noticeable step toward repurposing that facility," he said.

According to Beaudry, Calbag has successfully decommissioned other aluminum smelters, including one in The Dalles, Oregon, that is "complete and repurposed for commercial, business and retail development."

The public comment period for the proposed Superfund designation for the CFAC site ends May 24.

Online:

www2.epa.gov/region8/columbia-falls-aluminum-reduction-plant.

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